



Gotta Have Friends (Bette Midler)



What SAY You Global Community?

We recently traveled to Toronto and while traveling on the train I took a photo of this advertisement, on persons with disabilities. I often do this but kept going back to this particular photo because I was in a different country.

My mind began wondering about how other countries address persons with intellectual disabilities in totality. So I clicked on the link from the photo and it was quite informative.



Community Living - "Our Concerns, Our Rights."

[Learn More](#)

Similarly to the U.S. the autistic population is underserved, underfunded and in some case unfortunately unwanted. The website asked for community funding

to stabilize support for the community, address housing issues and tackle structural deficiencies. In essence the organization was asking for the community to recognize their dignity. What a novel idea?!?!

In 2017 the United Nations addressed Autism head on. The Secretary at the time noted the following:

“One in 160 children has an autism spectrum disorder, according to estimates by the UN World Health Organization (WHO). Around the world, one per cent of the entire population – possibly two per cent – is on the spectrum.”



"UN calls for recognizing the rights of people with autism to make their own decisions"

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The article also notes that lack of understanding leads to misinformation. In other words we just need to talk to each other about what Autism is and is not!

“In his statement, the President of the General Assembly, Peter Thomson said that awareness events, such as the one being held today, are important to helping people and their families lead more enjoyable lives.

A lack of understanding of the causes, symptoms and effects of autism has in many cases led to a proliferation of misinformation, anxiety and confusion...”
Peter Thompson.

Makes you go-hmmmm! Our global community is becoming increasingly more connected. How can we do a better job of communicating with each other. We can start by speaking and sharing our truths from both the neurodiverse and neurotypical perspective. This is not a complete solution but a solid GOOD start.

Definitions Matter

Over the past year I have received more inquiries about what autism is and is not based on recent leadership statements and current news on cures. This topic came up so much I updated my research to ensure I was sharing accurate information, and I am.

For the record there are a couple of definitions we should all be aware of.

Federal Definition

The federal definition of autism, according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), is a developmental disability that significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, typically appearing

Florida definition

In Florida, autism is defined in state law (e.g., Florida Statute 393.063) as a pervasive, neurologically based, extended-duration developmental disability that causes severe learning, communication, and behavioral disorders, with onset during infancy or childhood. It involves impairments in

before age three and adversely affecting a child's educational performance.

social interaction, communication, and a restricted repertoire of activities and interests.

DSM-5

The DSM-5 defines autism as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), characterized by persistent deficits in social communication and interaction, along with restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities.



The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illnesses is the latest edition of the American Psychiatric Association's professional reference book on mental health and brain-related conditions.

[Read Complete Manual](#)

So why do we care about these varying descriptions. WELL- Families with persons on the spectrum-including our family welcome and depend on accurate information to navigate the minefields of falsities that exist and our pushed on us. We all need to start with a baseline of truth.

While there has and will always be controversy about the various reasons autism exists and is more prevalent and I think I can fairly say that families living with a person on the spectrum care more about how to support this population from birth to death.

Families care about

- The best doctors; neurologists, pediatricians and primary physicians as they age out
- The best specialists; Obygn, psychologists, psychiatrists
- The best treatments; ABA, speech, occupational and behavioral supports
- The best programs; neurodiversity within education and workforce
- The best educational resources; Wrights Law
- The best states to support us, Maine
- The best organizations; COPAA

What we generally get over rather quickly is the WHY? Because that issue alone pushes families down a dangerous rabbit hole with never ending hypotheticals.

Investing money, resources and research is welcomed. Sharing unhelpful and inaccurate with judgment is not.

History Of Man Who Died

In 2023 first person ever to be diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder died. His name was Donald Triplet and by all accounts-based

on what I have been able to research-HE was a simple person with interesting hobbies, very gifted and bright. It appears he benefited from a stable loving community that accepted him for who he was and allowed him to live a meaningful life. That is what we all hope for as parents and caregivers for LOVED ones on the spectrum.



This man was 89 years old. Think about the village that it took to get him from birth to death.



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[View Video](#)

FL Public School No More Certification

This week our educational leadership made a decision that will drastically change the lives of persons with individual disabilities. Students who can no longer meet the requirements for a standard diploma will not have any other degree or certification option. You may say to yourself why is this a challenge and ask why does it matter. Here's why!

- Based on personal experience it is quite difficult to educate educators- and yes I am one of them- about the plethora of disabilities that exist, the wide range of abilities within the varying disability and how to best tap potential.
- Students without disabilities who have academic hurdles may still find work or support if they make the decision to leave the school system
- Students with disabilities who have academic hurdles -yes-may still find work but the percentages of finding a job and keeping a job our nominal at best.
- All persons entering the workforce need some sort of credentials to obtain an entry level position. Most employers at a baseline require a high school diploma or equivalent. Without this basic requirement locating a meaningful position is nearly impossible.
- Even with these credentials persons with disabilities utilize Vocational Rehab and programs like Goodwill for placement. Again this is with moderate or some level of credentials.



"Florida will phase out certificates of completion for students with disabilities"

[Read Article](#)

So the question is as a society what will become of this already vulnerable population. The most pragmatic response is that families supporting them will have additional stress and tax payers will debate over the level of funding and programs this population is entitled to.

As an educator, attorney and advocate I am well aware of the policy analysis required to make this decision. All decisions have consequences. This one may have grave ones.

For families who want to more about how this impacts them, you should reach out to your respective school boards. There is generally an ESE liaison who can support you.

When You Love Someone They Show Up

We have a niece, Hydeia Thomas by love that has spent many hours of her young life caring for our daughter and as a result our family. We have so many years of memories that is too much to even summarize in any meaningful way. This weekend we just added that many more. It was so beautiful to see our lovely niece grown and happy and settled in her profession. She poured as much love as she could into Emersen in a very tight Weekend and I will forever be grateful because she always brings her dose of joy at just the right time. Emersen misses her sister and all of her sisters friends who were her extended family.



She says often everyone grew up and left. It's hard to hear, but she is right. Time moves on. In any event, I am grateful for the continued love and support I receive from these young people who are now adults rocking the world.

Thank you Hydeia for always being present! And thank you to her very special mommy, Shonda Evans for always sharing her daughter with me.

In case you missed it! [July Newsletter](#)

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